

Activity Exercises with Speech

The 'Activity Exercises' are intended to enlarge and extend the whole of the child's motor and perceptual experience but, directing our attention towards the linguistic aspects, a basic pattern can be outlined largely in terms of example techniques.

It may well be thought at first sight that, aside from the modified position of the speech source and the avoidance of unnecessary amplification, there is little difference between the methods suggested here and many in common use. This, in many ways, is probably so; however, it is this seemingly small difference which I contend to be of singular importance in the treatment of dysgnosic children.

It is not simply that speech needs to be used as an integral part of a child's daily life activities and not as an isolated skill, but that early language is activity based and has no meaning – no existence even – in the early stages without its being directly and immediately tied to the child's activity.

In the simplest activity exercises no apparatus is required other than can be held in the hands but once more complex manipulations and perceptual discriminations are involved, a small table and suitable chairs are pretty well essential. (See previous note 'Perceptual Exercising in the Remote or Distractable Child').

The sorts of activities which can be used may, of course, be invented on the spot to suit the child and the occasion.

That an action is required as a response to speech may be demonstrated first by following the command by the passive activity (passive, that is, from the child's point of view), then repeating the command in a modified or indicative form signifying accomplishment perhaps by actively demonstrating the results of the activity response e.g. "Let's put the brick on the table" or "We'll put baby's shoe on" – operation – "There we've put his shoe on," etc., etc.

Each speech function can be clearly demonstrated by carrying out the activity type required.

A little formula (using close contact, a short highly polarised communication channel, structured passive displacements leading to active movement, visual and auditory stimulation from the materials, together with 'emotionally charged' speech and other 'show' from the teacher) which I find very effective on some children can be illustrated as follows:

Early Stages:

Close social contact is gained with the child through active movement, accompanied by simple conversational level speech of the sort – “Come along, let’s have a game”.

Taking the child’s hands in one’s own and enclosing a coloured brick in each, bring these together in a series (five is a good number to choose) of rhythmic taps, accompanying each tap with a vocalisation – e.g. “bang – bang – bang – bang – bang”.

Having by this manoeuvre brought a smile to the child’s lips or better still a giggle or a laugh or a show-off look towards mother, etc., now add to the speech something of the order “Come on – let’s do that again.”

Then begins the simple speech pattern which might take the form: “Ready” – (slight hesitation) – “Go! Bang – bang – bang – bang.”

This is repeated several times or until the laugh is not quite so great signifying need for a change of interest.

Then – “Let’s have a different game”. For example – Dispense with the bricks. Take the child’s empty hands in teacher’s and “Sawing! Ready? (Pause) Go! Saw – saw – saw – saw – saw – saw,” accompanied by reciprocal and alternating sawing movements with the hands and arms.

This might lead to “twisting” or some other word-activity where full onomatopoeic relevance can be given to the words. The long-drawn-out, replete with glottal plosion and grunt!

One game which always goes down well if the child has reached this stage is “Push-pull” using two interlocking plastic bricks or beads.

Here, after some alerting or trigger phrase the bricks held within the child’s hands are pushed together accompanied by “P-u-s-h” and culminating in a click when the nipple of one brick enters the hole of the other.

Then, “Now let’s pull. P-u-l-l” said together with all the counterfeited show of effort which can be mustered until, after a brief manufactured delay, the bricks separate with a “plop”.

They should be disengaged fairly readily but make a loud noise when they part, for quite soon the child will do his own pulling but may continue to require help with the more complicated task of rearticulation for a while.

He will then pull together with the ‘teacher’s’ sympathetic grunting vocal accompaniment but offer the bricks for rearticulation after a brief person attempt.

I have often found this gesture to be the first social overture from a primarily autistic child just emerging from his remote and insular condition.

From this one can go on, at the appropriate stage, to undressing and dressing, feeding, bathing and bedding a doll, which can be extended to the child's own self-help skills, with one or two reservations, to 'posting' solid shapes, completing a form board, building, taking out and replacing inserts in a simple picture jig-saw, play with model farm, doll's house furniture, recreation ground, zoo situations, etc.

Positional relationships are realised in active terms via various routes and between a variety of different objects.

For example, "We'll put the car right over there" may be accompanied by extended reaching and the slight effort of rising forward to place the object at a distance. It can be recovered after a short time interval being preceded by a form such as "Where is that car?" and a questioning bodily attitude, if necessary a momentary pause, to allow child to respond by reaching, fixating the car, assuming a searching, enquiring or expectant attitude depending on his stage of development – "Oh there it is ... there's the car over there you bring the car back."

In a similar way, "Let's put the cow under your chair (action) and put the key under your chair (action) ... and put the glove under your chair (action) etc Now just look at all those things under your chair (accompanied by elaborated bending and peering under the chair) you bring them out again and put them on the table (enumerating etc. if appropriate)".

Again: "Make the car go through the "You make the dog hide behind the Climb over jump over go round behind round and round crawl under slide it under fall off push it off lift it up climb up jump up jump down go between put _____ between squeeze the _____ between put the _____ in the drop the _____ in the right down to the bottom look under look behind look down look through look in look round etc., etc.

For example the activity phrases "Pick the _____ up", "Put it (or the _____) in the _____", "Turn it over", "Turn it round", etc., can be readily introduced by the method of anticipation, making use of the child's obsessional tendencies, as soon as he reaches the stage of spontaneously rectifying a disorientated play object. Using for example, 'Rowing eight with cox', the 'little men' may be fed to the child one by one from various directions with the injunction to 'put this one in the boat', spoken from continually varying positions to either side or behind or above the child's head, and accompanied by adequate vocal and haptic expression of approval for success.

Once this activity is in happy train it becomes possible, whilst offering a 'little man' from one side, to surreptitiously slip another into the boat but in an inverted position. The injunction "You turn that one over" is timed from the moment the child is observed to become aware of the anomaly and seems about to redress the situation. If necessary, of course, his attention can be drawn to the upside-down man.

Slightly later using a form-board or picture inset board the child can be induced to reorientate in one plane or reverse a purposely misplaced piece before fitting it into its recess.

"There's another one (or) Here's the dog you turn it over" or "turn it round that's right turn it round and push it in", etc., introducing descriptive names for the various pieces and allowing a brief interval between an introductory or interrogative phrase and the appropriate action.

Other adverbial forms may be similarly presented, as may adjectival elements, though perhaps less obviously, by emphasising the dynamic nature or basis of quality and comparative size, or a contrast between qualities brought into physical relationship.

'DRY POURING'

Introductory Method And Speech

Apparatus

Shallow tray. Jug. Handleless tin.

Screw top bottle.

Dozen beans. Dessert spoon.

Activities

Child under strict instruction reaches for bottle of beans, unscrews cap, puts down cap, pours beans from jar into jug or tin using one hand, tips beans from jug into tin, or vice versa, pours them onto tray, picks them up one by one putting them back in the jug, picks up spoon to stir beans, pours back into storage jar, replaces cap, replaces jar, pushes back tray ... and variants.

Instructional Phrases

'Wait', 'No', 'Put it back?' 'Unscrew the cap/lid', 'Screw it up', 'Pick up the jar' ... 'the jug' ... 'the spoon' ... 'the beans' . . . 'Hold ... the handle ...', 'Tip out the beans'.

'Put them ...', 'Pour them ... into the *jug* ... into the *tin* ... onto the *tray* ...'

'Get the spoon', 'Stir the beans', 'Round and round', ' ... with your fingers',
'Two hands', 'Over there', 'Turn it round', 'Turn it over', 'Push it back'.

'Push your chair back', 'Stand up', 'Turn round'.

'Put it ... on the table ... on the chair ...' etc.

'Give the ... Give it ... to me ... to Mummy ...' etc.

Expansion of basic vocabulary and qualifying speech alternatives

Bowl/basin, jar/bottle, lid/cap/top, top/bottom/sides.

Colander, dustpan and brush, funnel, saucepan.

Tip/pour/empty, some, a little, half full, 'one at a time', 'all of it', slowly,
carefully, properly, quickly ...

Big, tall, little, round, square, glass, metal, (colours) ...

Round, behind, under, between ...

Link with Doll Play ... lead to 'Cooking', Weighing, 'Shops', etc.

TAKING TO PIECES AND RE-ASSEMBLING

Introductory Method and Speech

Apparatus Wooden 'dismantleable' toy. Wheels, steering wheel, axles, seats,
wings, engine, rudder. Nuts, Chassis. Receptacles - Box, Bowl ...

Activities 'Wait', 'No', 'Push it back', 'Turn it round', 'Turn it over'.

'Pull out the steering wheel', 'Put it down there ... here'.

'Put it on the ... in the ...'

'Unscrew the nut', 'Two hands', 'Pull off the wheel'

'Lift off the ... seat'

'Push on the ...', 'Push the wheel on', 'Screw up the nut', 'Screw it up', 'Round and round'. 'Tightly'.

At this stage much of the actual work may be done by the teacher. The child must wait for the instruction but may be allowed to anticipate the next move. All nuts, wheels, seats, etc., should be put together in well spaced groups to aid recovery.

Expansion of basic vocabulary etc. Limitation of anticipation

Qualifies – (Colours), big/little, round/square, (Combinations) 'big yellow . . '

'by the box', 'with the . . .' 'all by itself', 'under the . . .',

'round behind', 'through', 'properly', 'carefully', 'the other way'.

'on your chair', 'on the big chair beside you'.

Many redundant or superfluous manoeuvres will be introduced to force child to attend to speech and not depend on his intelligence. Similar objects may now be separated and identified according to colour, situation, association, etc.

IMAGINATIVE PLAY WITH DOLL – 'BABY'

Introductory Method and Speech

Apparatus Baby doll, feeding bottle, cup, spoon, napkin, chair for doll.

Bath, soap, flannel, nail brush, hair brush, comb, towel, 'nappy'.

Activities Child under strict instruction picks up, places baby on chair, feeds baby, mother, himself, etc., variously with spoon, bottle, cup. Bathes, dries, 'dresses' baby, etc.

Instructional Phrases 'Wait', 'No', 'Put baby in the chair', 'Pick up her ... bottle, cup, spoon, etc. 'Give her something to eat', 'Give her ... Give Mummy ... Give me ... a drink'.

'The table ... push it back', 'The chair ... push it back', etc.

'Put the bath there', 'Put baby in the bath', 'Here's the flannel'.

'Wash her face', 'Wash ... her hands, tummy, legs'. 'Take her out'.

'Put her on the towel', 'Dry her face, hands ... etc'.

Expansion of basic vocabulary etc. Orange, milk, etc. Drink of milk etc.

Bib, etc. Hair, eyes, nose, ears, neck, fingers, thumbs, toes,
back...

'Mix it up', 'Stir it round', 'Splash ...', 'Slide'.

'Wrap her up', 'Keep her warm', 'Don't let her get cold'.

'Turn the tap', 'Put some water in', 'Pull the plug out',

'Let the water out', Brush, warm, hot, cold, hard, good,
naughty, easy. 'Brush her toes ... her hair'.

Quickly, slowly, carefully, backwards.

Extending the Understanding of the Meanings of Substantives

Word defined by reference to its:-

- Active function - the characteristic activity/activities engaged in
e.g. gun – shoots; fish – swims; bird – flies, pecks
- Passive use - the characteristic use(s) to which it is put
e.g. string – for tying; bed – for sleeping; brush – for sweeping the floor; bucket – for carrying water ('you put water in it'); comb – for doing hair; house – for living in
- Family group family to which the object might be considered to belong
e.g. watch – a little clock; lion – like a big cat; armchair – chair; cot – a bed
- Synonym word or phrase that means something similar to or nearly the same as another in the same language
e.g. close – shut (the door); beneath - below
- Attributes subordinate components
e.g. house (has) – windows, doors, roof, etc.; mouse (has) – four legs, long tail, etc.; shoe (has) – laces, heel, etc.
- Properties
e.g. sponge – soft, can be squeezed; ball – round, bounces; pencil – long and narrow, with a lead, you can hold it in your hand; iron (metal) – hard, heavy, feels cold
... big/flat/hollow/alive/red
- Substrate what it is made of or from
e.g. it's made of wood, paper, iron, metal, plastic – from a tree, from snow.

Relatives by association – what often goes with what

e.g. shoes and socks; mummy and daddy; knife and fork;
watch - time; cup of tea – drink; hand – glove;
foot – shoe; head – hat

Increase linguistic competence (understanding of speech)

- (i) Consolidate the present state of speech understanding through frequent use under varying conditions and involving new situations

- (ii) Expand speech understanding by
 - (a) increasing vocabulary
 - (b) extending the denotative and connotative limits of the present vocabulary.
 - (c) exercising inflections and equivalent structures (plurality, person, gender, tense and mood)
 - (d) lengthening the utterance to be interpreted
 - (e) refining the preciseness of verbal control

- (iii) Introduce words for new things, activities, descriptions etc., and new (different) words for familiar things.

For example a jug might be denoted by such phrases as 'that one', 'that one there' (indicating), 'a jug' (indefinite), 'the jug' (definite), 'the big jug' (size), '...blue jug' (colour), 'my jug' (possessor) '...with a crack in it' (attribute), 'for pouring' (use), 'the pourer' (synonym), 'for the milk' (association), 'covered up by the cloth' (relative condition), 'in the cupboard' (absolute position), 'beside the tin' (relative position), etc. On the other hand most of these terms could be used in conjunction with other objects or materials and might be varied in their own right, e.g. big/large/huge/enormous/gigantic/like a house/bigger/biggest, etc.

Verbal and adverbial forms may be varied in a synonymic as well as in a generic way, e.g. push (press, force, squeeze, etc) it down hard. (firmly/with all your might/strength), etc.